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The feminisation of poverty

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 1800 (2007)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has taken note with interest of Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1800 (2007) on "The feminisation of poverty", which it has brought to the attention of the member states' governments and transmitted to the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) and the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS).

2. The Assembly notes in Resolution 1558 (2007) on "The feminisation of poverty", to which it refers in the above-mentioned recommendation, that gender inequality is one of the factors responsible for the feminisation of poverty. In that respect, the Committee of Ministers recalls the commitment made at the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government in Warsaw to step up efforts to achieve real equality between women and men in all spheres of society, and accordingly to devise effective rules and machinery to prevent and eradicate gender-based discrimination.

3. These rules have all been brought together in Recommendation Rec(2007)17 on gender equality standards and mechanisms, which the Committee of Ministers adopted and addressed to the member states in November 2007, with strong encouragement to governments to take or reinforce necessary measures to implement gender equality in practice, taking fully into account the principles and standards laid down. The Committee of Ministers also attaches great importance to gender mainstreaming, particularly in the sphere of social cohesion. Here it recalls its Recommendation No. R (98) 14 on gender mainstreaming.

4. The Committee of Ministers is aware of the phenomenon of feminisation of poverty, linked with multiple factors such as unequal consideration of women's qualifications on the labour market, a higher unemployment rate than for men, and frequently lower wages and retirement pensions. It was specifically to combat these phenomena that the 6th European Ministerial Conference on Equality between Women and Men, on the theme of "Human rights and economic challenges in Europe – gender equality", held in Stockholm on 8 and 9 June 2006, adopted an action plan for achieving gender equality in all spheres of society and a resolution entitled "Achieving gender equality: a challenge for human rights and a prerequisite for economic development".

5. This resolution puts forward proposals for strategies to promote equality between women and men, including gender analysis and provision by the member states of sex-disaggregated statistics which should enter into the planning, development and implementation of national, regional and local policies in their various fields of action. The Committee of Ministers brought the aforementioned resolution and action plan to the attention of the governments of the member states so that they might be guided by it in framing and implementing their national equality policies, as well as to the Assembly, the Congress and all steering committees.

6. Unequal division of family and domestic responsibilities (child care, care of dependent family members, etc.) is a major cause of discrimination against women on the labour market and of their limited social and political participation. On that score, the Committee of Ministers reiterates its appeal to the member states,

1. adopted at the 1034th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (11 September 2008)

already made in its Recommendation No. R (96) 5 on reconciling work and family life and taken up again in Recommendation Rec(2007)17, to take appropriate steps to promote equal sharing of tasks in respect of family responsibilities and ensure that these do not constitute a source of discrimination.

7. The Committee of Ministers also took care to give prominence in the latter recommendation to another major indicator of the states' political will and commitment to equality between women and men. It concerns the incorporation of a gender perspective into the budgetary process and its use in all programmes and all fields as a necessary instrument for ensuring that the principle of equality between women and men is upheld in the distribution and allocation of resources. This question will be enlarged upon in particular at a conference to be organised by the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG) in May 2009 in Athens.

8. The Committee of Ministers further draws the Assembly's attention to the recommendations made by the High-Level Task Force on Social Cohesion seeking to intensify promotion of social rights in Europe. In this context, the European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS) should initiate work to establish "social cohesion indicators" for elaborating, through public-private sector dialogue and citizen involvement, sets of indicators of well-being as tools to reinforce anti-poverty and exclusion strategies and to ensure stakeholder involvement in promoting cohesive and sustainable societies.